



Historia Fidei Lux

# Gathered Fragments

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## Pittsburgh: Where Saints Walked

By Sr. Ursula Kelly, S.S.N.D.

Pittsburgh is rich in natural beauty. Standing in our Golden Triangle we are awed by Mt. Washington, the West End lookout, Spring Hill and Troy Hill. The waters from the Allegheny and Monongahela merge to form the Ohio River. Consider that those same scenes were viewed through the eyes of saints.

Pittsburgh has been a home, a destination, or a stop along the way to several who have been beatified or canonized, or whose cause has been introduced in Rome.

### Saint John Neumann

On Sunday morning, Oct. 18, 1840, a young priest from Buffalo, N.Y., Father John Neumann, stepped off the stagecoach and hurried to St. Philomena's Church, in what is now Pittsburgh's Strip District. The Redemptorists in charge of the "Factory Church" lost no time in putting him to work. That first morning he was asked to sing the High Mass and preach, which he promptly did, despite the fatigue of his journey.

Pittsburgh in those days was a bustling town of 50,000. Foundries and mills were already flourishing. Ore was plentiful, and coal could be mined nearby. St. Philomena's was then an old factory converted to serve as a parish church until some more appropriate structure could be built.

As a novice, Father Neumann busily engaged in parish work. Records show that he administered baptism 54 times in his six-month Pittsburgh stay.

He continued his novitiate in



St. John Neumann

Baltimore and elsewhere, making his profession—the first Redemptorist to do so in America—Jan. 16, 1842.

Two years later he was chosen to return to St. Philomena's as pastor. Immediately he faced the problem of raising money to complete the new parish Church at 14th and Liberty. He began a Church Building Society and

asked each parishioner to contribute at least five cents a week. At times, he was at wit's end. "Often on a Friday," said his companion, Father Francis Seelos, "he never knew where he was going to get the money for the payroll on Saturday."

Still, when a disastrous fire swept Pittsburgh in 1845—destroying 1,000 dwellings—he ordered a special collection to help the victims.

Little by little, the stately Gothic church went towering into the sky. The church was dedicated in October 1846. Bishop Michael O'Connor remarked that Father Neumann had built a church without money.

Still more important was the energy Father Neumann infused into the spiritual life of the parish. The newcomers to America liked societies, so he began pious associations. A school met in the rectory basement—and soon there were three schools controlled by the parish. Meanwhile, apostolic work continued in the outlying districts. Parish registers testify to Father Neumann's presence at McKeesport, Hill District, South Side, Sharpsburg, Lawrenceville, North Side, Pine

### Noted Author to Speak on Prince Gallitzin

Matthew Bunson, author of many books—including *Our Sunday Visitor's Encyclopedia of Catholic History*—will speak to the historical society on Sunday, May 16, at 2:30 p.m. at Synod Hall, Oakland. Mr. Bunson will address the subject of his upcoming biography: Father Demetrius Gallitzin, the Apostle of the Alleghenies. Father Gallitzin was a Russian prince, a patriotic American, a convert to Catholicism, and a formidable apologist for the faith. He was the first priest to be ordained in the United States, and for four decades labored in pastoral ministry in Western Pennsylvania.

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Creek, West End, Collensville, and other places. Father Neumann baptized, married, and buried parishioners what are now St. Mary, Glenshaw; St. Mary and St. Joseph, North Side; St. Alphonsus, Wexford; and St. Michael, South Side. He also found time to give a retreat to Pittsburgh seminarians and serve as confessor to Bishop O'Connor. He composed a Bible history as well as two catechisms for Pittsburgh, all printed at Boylan's Press on Wood Street.

Father Neumann also served as confessor and spiritual director of the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy, who had just come to America in 1843. He preached their first three retreats and helped to launch of Mercy Hospital.

Father Neumann's health gave way soon after the church was finished. His doctor advised a change of climate. In January 1847, Father Neumann took the stagecoach back to Baltimore, leaving Pittsburgh behind—though not for long. Within a month, he was appointed the Redemptorists' superior in America, and he returned to Pittsburgh regularly afterward. Later, as bishop of Philadelphia, he traveled again to Pittsburgh, in 1855, for the consecration of St. Paul's Cathedral.

He died in 1860, at 48, worn out from apostolic work. His body now reposes under the altar of St. Peter's Church in Philadelphia. He was canonized in 1977.

## Blessed Mary Theresa Gerhardinger

On Nov. 17, 1985, Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Mary Theresa of Jesus (Caroline Gerhardinger), foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Born in 1797 in Germany, Caroline witnessed, at age twelve, the oppression and dispersion of her religious teachers when Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine. She continued her secular education to become a state-certified teacher. Meanwhile, her bishop and a local priest were praying and working for the education of girls of the

poorer classes. They joined efforts to guide Caroline and two of her friends in educational training, and then to initiate them into religious life.

By 1833, the political situation had improved so that Caroline could focus on educating poor girls. She established the Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Meanwhile, missionaries in America pleaded for the sisters to come to teach the children of German immigrants. So Mother Theresa, four sisters and a novice made the journey. Their destination was the German colony at St. Mary's, Pa., then part of the Pittsburgh diocese.

On arrival, however, they learned that the colony had no school. Moreover, they found that their letters of introduction from the archbishop of Munich had never been forwarded to Bishop O'Connor of Pittsburgh. Fortunately, the sisters were befriended by Father John Neumann.

The sisters began to transform several abandoned log cabins into a school. Since the site was so remote, Mother Theresa realized it would be unsuitable as a motherhouse.

Soon, Mother Theresa traveled to Pittsburgh to meet Bishop O'Connor. Since the representative of St. Mary's had not followed ecclesiastical protocol, the visit was unpleasant. Mother Theresa returned to St. Mary's and urged two of the sisters to provide the best possible education for the poor

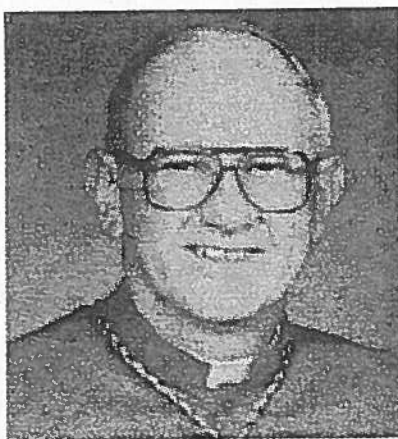
children. She then made plans for the other sisters to accompany her to Baltimore. The archbishop of Baltimore offered the Sisters three schools to staff. Though only one sister was present at each school, their expertise soon caused the parents and pastors to ask for more sisters.

Within a year (1848), Bishop O'Connor requested sisters for St. Philomena in Pittsburgh. Father Neumann helped the community's growth by inviting Mother Theresa to join him as he traveled to the Redemptorist missions.

After a year, Mother Theresa returned to Europe. Her community continued to grow. At the time of her death in 1879, there were more than 2,300 sisters serving in 31 countries.

## Blessed Katharine Drexel

A native of Philadelphia, Mother Katharine Drexel had important ties to Pittsburgh. Born into a wealthy family, she inherited a large fortune. After a long period of prayer, Katharine decided to found a new religious community to care for blacks and Indians in the United States. Still, it was necessary that she spend time with an established religious community. At the suggestion of Bishop James O'Connor of Omaha, she decided to spend the time of her postulancy (six months) and novitiate (one year) with the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy.



*The Catholic Historical Society extends congratulations and the promise of our prayers to Bishop William Winter as he celebrates the 10th anniversary of his ordination to the episcopate, Feb. 13, 1989. Bishop Winter has long served as episcopal moderator to the Society. We wish him many more happy and fruitful years.*



*Mother Drexel was the subject of a recent cover story in U.S. News and World Report.*

Hers was a special vocation. The Sisters of Mercy realized this, so Katharine was given a broad training. She was introduced into all phases of the ministry of the Mercy Sisters. She worked at Mercy Hospital and taught black children at St. Joseph School, which was then located on the Hill.

On Nov. 7, 1889 Sister Katharine was formally accepted as a novice at St. Mary Convent. Mother Sebastian, R.S.M., suggested Mary Katharine as her name in religion. Katharine was pleased because it was a form of her baptismal name, Catharine Mary, and called both of her patronesses, St. Catherine of Siena, and Mother Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

During those Pittsburgh years, 13 candidates applied for admission to Katharine's new congregation, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. On Feb. 12, 1891, Katharine pronounced her vows as the congregation's first member and superior. Mother Inez, R.S.M., who had served as Novice Mistress for the fledgling band was loaned to them when the sisters returned to Philadelphia. Mother Katharine always spoke lovingly of the Sisters of Mercy and Pittsburgh. She would sometimes stop at St. Mary Convent as she traveled to work with her beloved Indians of the West.

*This article was condensed from a longer lecture given by Sr. Ursula Kelly, an educational consultant to the Diocese of Pittsburgh and a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.*

## From Pittsburgh to Mexico: A Pilgrimage of Two Generations

By Tom Krill

The city park, known as the "21st of May," lies between the Church of the Immaculate Conception and city hall in the center of Cordoba, Veracruz, Mexico. The snow-capped volcano Mt. Orizaba overlooks the scene. There in the park, facing the church, is a bronze bust of Father Frank Krill.

My Great-Uncle Francis Joseph Krill was born in on June 10, 1866, near Pius Street in on the South Side of Pittsburgh. The son of German immigrants, Frank received his primary education at St. Michael's parish school, where classes were conducted half in German and half in English. He entered the Passionist Order in 1884 and was ordained in 1891.

Family history has it that he left the Passionists in 1895 when he was denied permission to visit his ailing mother. Shortly afterward, he went to Mexico.

"Padre Francisco Krill" arrived in Mexico in around 1896, during the presidency of Porfirio Diaz. Diaz, who ruled Mexico for 40 years, tolerated the Church, in spite of the laws to the contrary. So Father Krill rode in amid a rebirth of the Church in Mexico.

In Cordoba, Father Krill went to work on the restoration of the Church of the Immaculate Conception, which was the centerpiece of the town. But Father Frank was also dedicated to the improvement of the city. On donated land, he built a park. Within the park, he diverted water from the river to

form a system of canals and a lake, where picnickers could rent small boats or fish. The author of a local history recalled how Father Frank taught him to play baseball at the park, with a ball the priest had made himself, out of thread.

Perhaps Father Frank is best known for founding the local fire department and acquiring the first fire engine. Even today, in the firemen's parade every year, a huge float commemorates Father Frank founding of the department.

Radical changes came with the revolutions of 1910 and 1913. With President Francisco Madero's assassination in 1913 came the seizure of Church property and the persecution of priests and nuns. The election in 1924 brought even harsher treatment. In 1926, foreign priests and many bishops were banished. Most went into exile in Louisiana. Many priests went into hiding or were jailed. Those who fought back in the Cristero Rebellion were executed.

Family history says that Father Frank was jailed a number of times and that he had to say Mass in people's homes. A system of tunnels was constructed to allow Father Frank to leave the confines of the church to reach the homes. The authorities learned about the tunnels and made futile attempts to find them, including excavation of the floor of the crypt under the main altar.

Father Frank died in Puebla, Nov. 17, 1942. He is buried beneath the main altar of the church he served so well and which I visited in November 1998.